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Cuba Air Drop Was Hoax, U.S. Says

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WASHINGTON — The Defense Department Thursday said "Operation Phantom" — an alleged air drop over Cuba last month — was exactly that: a phantom. It was a publicity hoax, the department said.

Assistant Secretary Cyrus Vance said Frank Fiorini, an anti-Castro buccaneer who was supposed to have been aboard the plane, admitted that the flight never was made.

A report on the alleged raid was carried in The Fort Lauderdale News and The Pompano Beach Sun-Sentinel May 26.

In the story, a Cuban whose name was given as "Manuel Fernandez" claimed to have flown for 32 minutes over Cuba on May 25, and dropped supplies to 1,000 rebels at 17 locations.

The flight was supposed to have originated in Miami. The report stirred up widespread worry about U.S. ra-

dar defenses, which "Fernandez" said he eluded.

A spokesman in Miami for the 30th of November movement, Hiram Gonzalez, insisted the flight was made but "from a secret base in the Caribbean — not from Florida."

"We denied when the news was published that the flight involved Florida," he said.

Vance, in a letter to Rep. Carl Vinson, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said "Operation Phantom" was used for publicity by the 30th of November Movement.

Vance said Fiorini signed a two-sentence statement which said:

"To the best of my knowledge, a so-called Operation Phantom, a raid in Cuba on 25 May 1964, did not take place. I declare that the U.S. radar defenses were not violated while leaving or entering U.S. territory."